

How medical students can benefit from coaching in medicine

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An athletic coach encourages peak performance on the playing field, and the same principle applies when the coaching is academic and the setting is medical school. In both cases, the effort of the individual being coached—the coachee—is critical. Learn how to make the most of this relationship.

The answers can be found in the AMA's recently released, downloadable book, *It Takes Two: A Guide to Being a Good Coachee*. It's a great introduction to an effective, up-and-coming approach in medical education, pairing students with coaches from within the institution. Supporting this method is a part of the AMA's Accelerating Change in Medical Education initiative designed to train learners for the future of health care.

Coachee, advisee or mentee?

A useful starting point is to understand what a coachee is—and isn't—by drawing comparisons with more traditional assistance.

By medical school, every student will be familiar working with an adviser. They are typically assigned by the school, and the focus is on process—what the advisee needs to know about rules, protocols and requirements. It is an essential relationship, though typically an impersonal one.

Savvy medical students, as with learners in every other profession, have long sought out mentor relationships with experienced individuals able to give relevant career advice. What the mentee receives are insights related to long-term goals, from a trusted source in what can be a close relationship. "Mentors often help provide guidance to help us sort out complex decisions or paths that can be navigated in many different ways," notes the guide.

A medical school coach, in comparison, is who's needed for the student to develop professionally and excel at being a physician. It's a one-on-one approach in which the objectives are personal and professional progress toward maximum growth.

“A coach in medical education can help you achieve your full potential by helping you identify areas for improvement, develop goals and action plans and hold you accountable,” explains Chapter 2 of the guide, written by Emily Hogikyan, MD, Nicole Dayton, and Eric Skye, MD. “The best time for you to seek out a coach is when you would like to improve your performance.”

What the coachee gives and gets

Within the definition of that relationship with a coach, there is room for a range of learning subject matter. As the guide points out, it may be for a particular domain, such as an active critique of communication skills. Or it could be coaching that relies on reviewing performance data, including evaluations from clerkship or standardized patient encounters.

The guide describes the relationship as “learner-led.” In addition to working on the domain or topic at hand, the expectation is that management and agenda-setting of the relationship also come from the student. The coach will be there to help for that, but the guide offers three self-reflective questions for a learner to establish the focus of the coaching.

- Where are my knowledge and performance gaps?
- What roadblocks am I facing in closing these gaps?
- What skills does my coach bring that could help me move past these road blocks?

How to choose a coach

Many students may find they have been assigned a coach. Others may have to seek one out.

“Regardless of how you acquire a coach, it is important you feel that you can have a positive, productive and safe relationship with them,” says the guide. “Coaching is uniquely designed to create individualized plans and progress, and the relationship is paramount in allowing for this to happen.”

It largely comes down to a matter of finding the right fit. The guide devotes a detailed discussion to selecting a coach, or assessing the relationship with an assigned one, and a checklist. Some key elements to consider are:

- Do I feel my coach has my best interests at heart?
- Do I feel comfortable discussing the issues that are important to me with my coach?
- Does my coach seem interested and able to help me set goals?
- Does my coach challenge me to improve and help me to create individualized goals and plans?

- After considering our personalities, how can I work most effectively with my coach?
- Do I feel comfortable discussing issues in our coaching relationship with them?

Get more guidance from the AMA on coaching in medical education.